7. The Irish language

Speaking Irish

Frequency of speaking Irish

Gaeltacht Areas

An Phríomh-Oifig Staidrimh
Central Statistics Office

census 2016 RESULTS www.cso.ie

Erratum - 18.5.2023

The CSO has identified an error in the reporting of the Census 2016 population figures for Gaeltacht areas. The figure of 96,090 described as the population of Gaeltacht areas in several places in Census 2016 reports refers to the population aged three years and over. The total population of Gaeltacht areas as enumerated in Census 2016 was 99,617. This error will be corrected where appropriate.

Can you speak Irish?

The question on Irish language ability is broken into two parts; the first part asks "Can you speak Irish?" while the second asks about frequency of speaking the language.

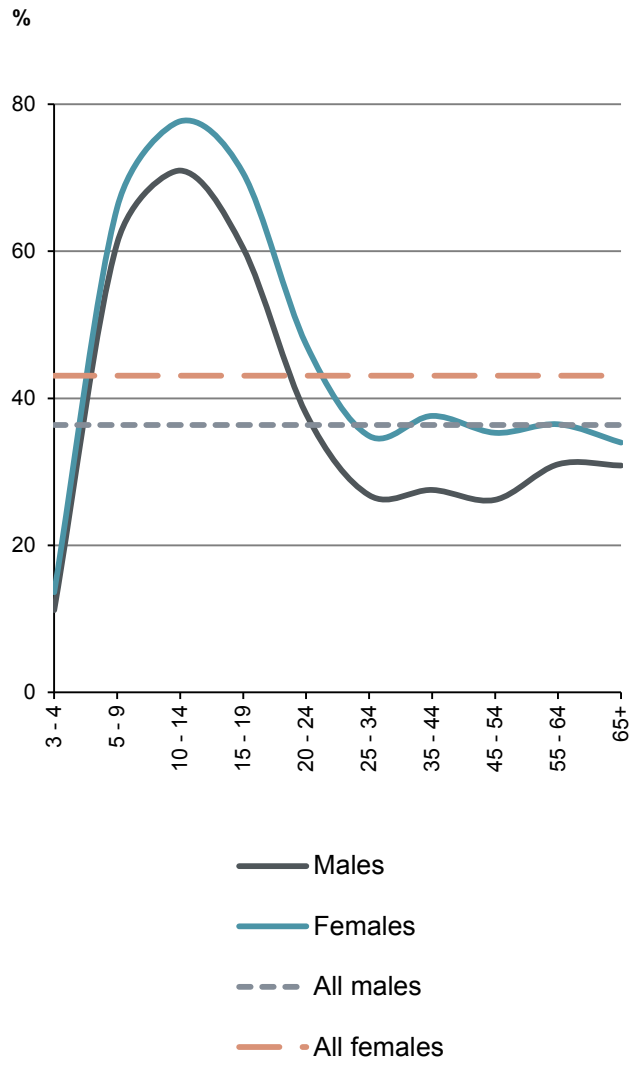
The total number of people who answered 'yes' to being able to speak Irish in April 2016 was 1,761,420, a slight decrease (0.7 per cent) on the 2011 figure of 1,774,437. This represents 39.8 per cent of respondents compared with 41.4 in 2011.

Almost 1 in 3, (30.1 per cent) 10 to 19 year olds answered "no" to the question "Can you speak Irish?"

8,068 Irish language forms were completed in Census 2016 compared with 8,676 in Census 2011.

See web table EY033

Figure 7.1 Irish speakers as a percentage of total population, by sex, 2016



Women and men

Figure 7.1 presents the results on ability to speak Irish for men and women separately. Previous censuses have consistently shown that more women than men identify themselves as being able to speak Irish; the results from this census bear this out.

43.1 per cent of women indicated they could speak Irish compared with just 36.4 per cent of men.

How often

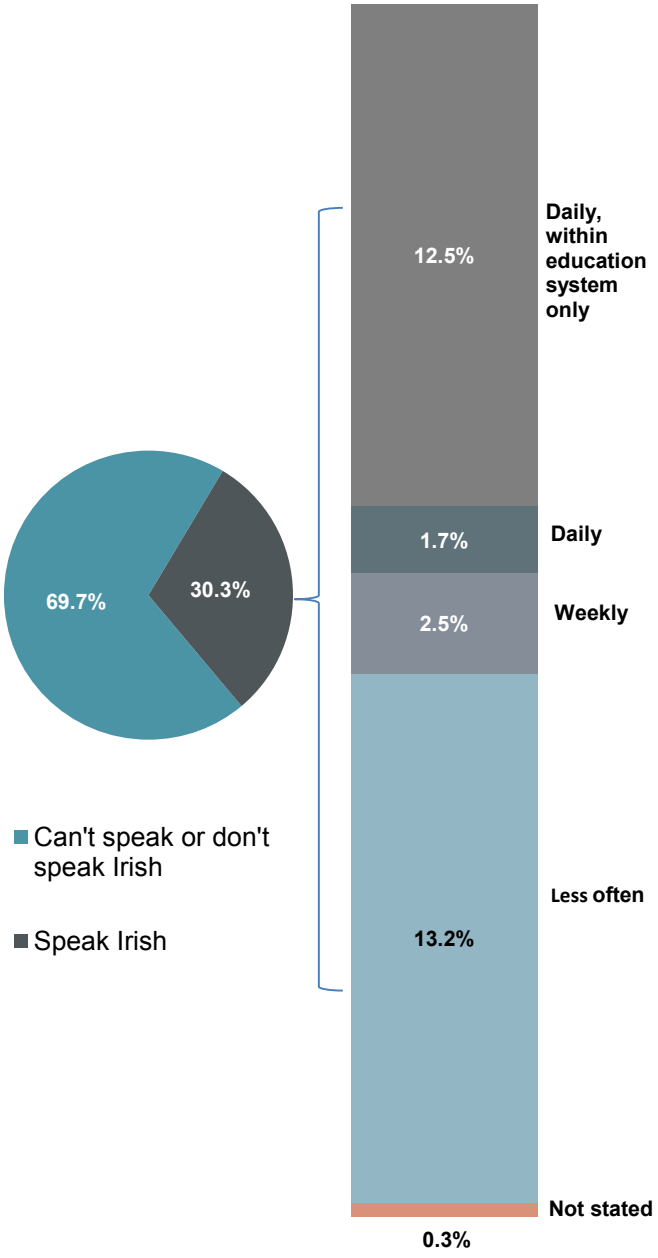
Of the 1.76 million who said they could speak Irish, 73,803 said they speak it daily outside the education system, a fall of 3,382 on the 2011 figure.

A further 111,473 said they spoke it weekly, while 586,535 said they spoke it less often. Over one in four (421,274) said they never spoke Irish.

The numbers speaking Irish weekly showed an increase of 831 persons, while those speaking Irish less often showed a decrease of 26,701.

See web table EY034

Figure 7.2 Population aged 3 years and over by frequency of speaking Irish, 2016



It's a fact!

1.7% The percentage of the population (3 or over) who spoke Irish daily (outside education) in Ireland

17.4% The percentage of the population (3 and over) who spoke Irish at all outside the education system

17 and 18 year olds

Of the total number of 122,612 persons aged 17 and 18 nearly 1 in 3 (40,626) answered 'no' to the question "Can you speak Irish?" Among males only 60.4 per cent answered 'yes' to this question, while for females it was 71.4 per cent.

Figure 7.3 Ability to speak Irish among 17 and 18 year olds, 2016

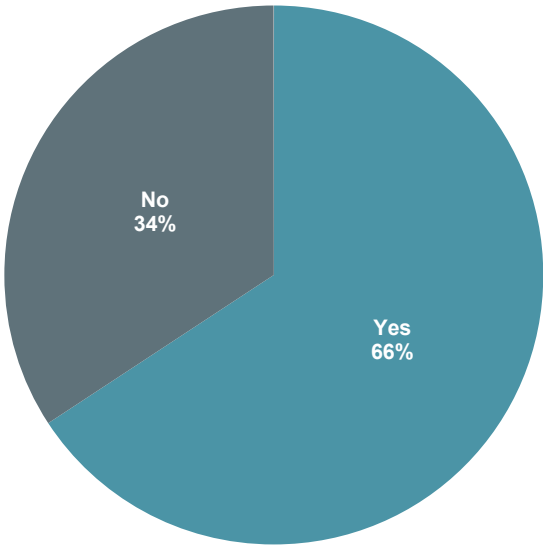
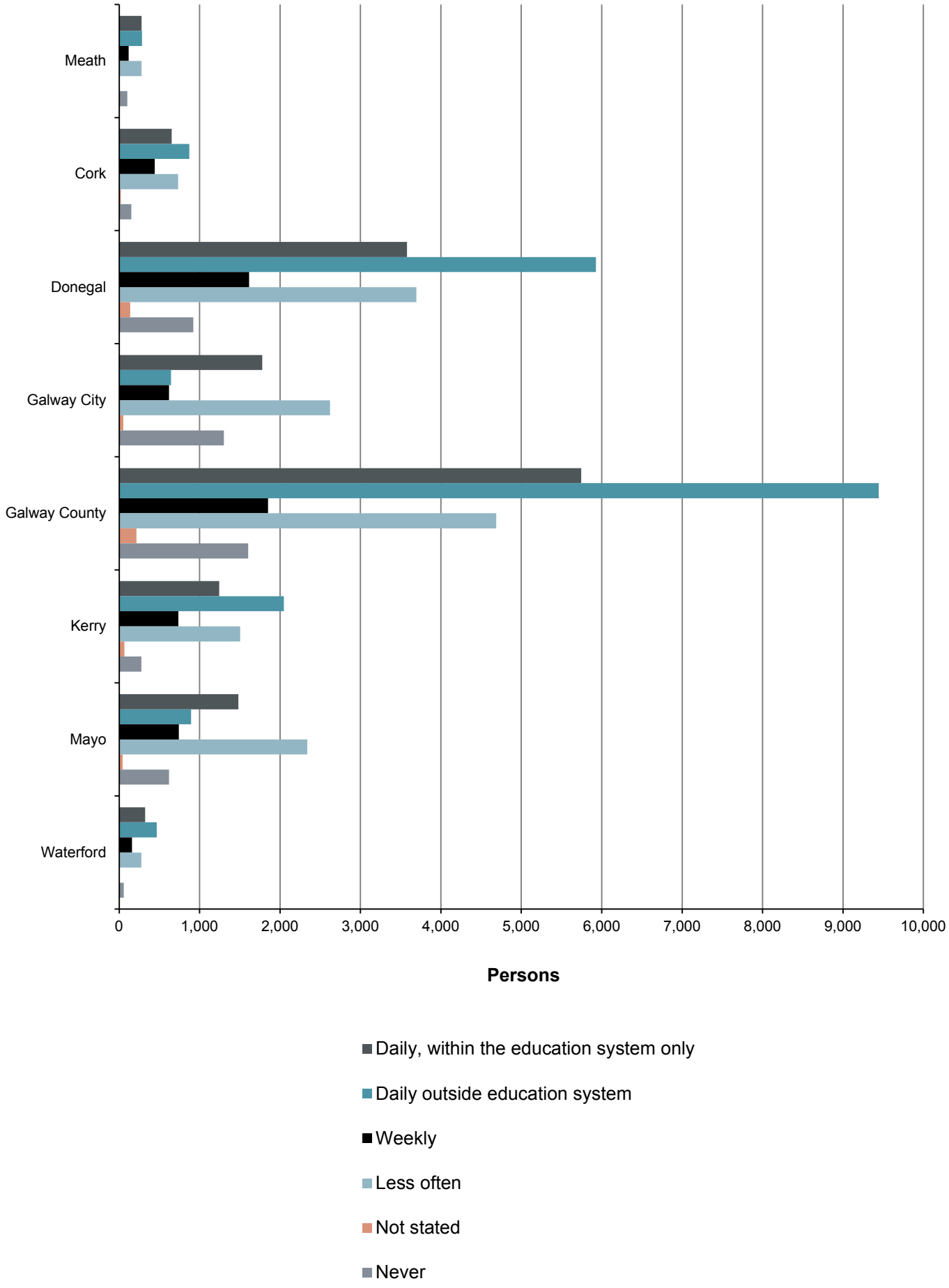


Figure 7.4 Persons aged 3 years and over in Gaeltacht areas by frequency of speaking Irish, 2016



Gaeltacht areas

Of the 73,803 daily Irish speakers (outside the education system), 20,586 (27.9%) lived in Gaeltacht areas.

The total population of all Gaeltacht areas in April 2016 was 99,617. There was 96,090 aged 3 years and over, down 0.6 per cent from 96,628 in 2011. Of these, 63,664 or 66.3 per cent, indicated they could speak Irish, while 20,586 (21.4 % of the total) indicated they spoke Irish daily outside the education system. This represents a fall of 11.2 per cent on the 2011 daily Irish speakers figure of 23,175.

The number of people in Gaeltacht areas who indicated they spoke Irish less often than weekly decreased by 0.7 per cent from 16,244 to 16,137.

See web table EY034

Table 7.1 Daily Irish speakers in Gaeltacht areas, 2011-2016

Gaeltacht Area	2011	2016	Actual change 2011-2016
Cork County	982	872	-110
Donegal County	7,047	5,929	-1,118
Galway City	636	646	10
Galway County	10,085	9,445	-640
Kerry County	2,501	2,049	-452
Mayo County	1,172	895	-277
Meath County	314	283	-31
Waterford County	438	467	29
All Gaeltacht Areas	23,175	20,586	-2,589

It's a fact!

2% The percentage of the population living in Gaeltacht areas

32% The percentage of Irish speakers in Gaeltacht areas who spoke Irish daily outside the education system

53,217 The number of people who live outside the Gaeltacht and spoke Irish outside the education system